

Old Masonic Temple
Trenton, Mercer County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Old Masonic Temple
Trenton, Mercer County, New Jersey

Owner: Grand Lodge of New Jersey

Date of Erection: 1793

Architect:

Builder:

Present condition: Building has been moved from its
original site and completely re-
stored

Number of stories: Two and one-half

Materials of construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - stone

Interior walls - plaster

Roof - slate

Historical Data:

Masonic history in America appears to have had its beginnings in Trenton in 1730; Masons in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania requested of the Grand Lodge in England a provincial grand master. Colonel Daniel Coxe of Trenton was appointed by the Duke of Norfolk, grand master of Masons in England. When the Grand Lodge in New Jersey was formed in 1786, Chief Justice David Brearley of Trenton was selected as grand master. Trenton Lodge #5 was the

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first in Trenton. The dispensation of the lodge was issued July 4, 1787; it was the fifth in the state. The warrant for the lodge was issued December 20, 1787. The first meetings were held in the homes of members and then in rented quarters. In 1793 a plot of land was given to the lodge on Barrack Street, now Willow Street. The cornerstone of the building was laid on August 26, 1793. A brick addition was added to the original building about 1860. For years the hall had been too small for the lodge, but money had not been forthcoming to erect a new structure; the addition of 1860 was therefore a compromise. The old property was finally sold early in 1868.

For years after the temple was given over to trade, being occupied by a furnisher and upholsterer. The original temple was bought back in 1915 and presented to the Grand Lodge. A new building was erected on the site of the first temple. The old building was moved to new foundations; some of the windows were replaced by new ones; the exterior stone work was pointed up; a new slate roof replaced the old slate roof; the interior stairs were replaced; the interior walls were cleaned and refinished; the original floors remained. The building is now being used as a Museum open to the public and is kept in repair by the Grand Lodge.

Before the Masons moved from the old hall it was given over to free education. A free school was established there with Thomas J. Macpherson as master. "The story of the development of the modern free school system of the last half century is thus told by Professor B. C. Gregory:

'Trenton has the honor of having established the first free school in New Jersey. As early as 1833, a school was organized in the old Masonic Hall, in Front Street. In 1838, this school was removed to

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the old jail building in Academy Street, the upper portion being used as a school and the basement as a jail.' " (Lee, 98)

Bibliography:

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(See Chapter XVII by E.L. Johnston)

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Reviewed Aug. 20, '38 T.W.